

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION
PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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NORMAN MCLEOD OF ILWU LOCAL 10, PCPA

INTERVIEWEE: Norman McLeod

INTERVIEWERS: Harvey Schwartz, Conor Casey

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HARVEY SCHWARTZ 00:00:10

This is Harvey Schwartz. I'm in Vancouver, British Columbia. Today's the 17th of September 2019. I'm with Norman McCleod and this is part of the PCPA Oral History Project. Can you spell your last name?

NORMAN MCLEOD 00:00:29

M, c, capital L, E, O, D.

HARVEY 00:00:33

Okay. Well, can you tell me when we were born and where you were born?

NORMAN 00:00:37

I was born on September the 22nd 1946 in Oklahoma.

HARVEY 00:00:44

Okay. What were your parents doing for work that time?

NORMAN 00:00:50

At that time my mother was, when I was actually born, she was single. And she got married to my stepfather [the] next year, and he was kind of a sharecropper and then he stopped that and started working as a janitor. He-- His first job was the Turner Turnpike, and helped put that across the state of Oklahoma. And then he became one of the workers in one of the restaurants which was-- I don't recall the name of it right now, but they used to be all up and down the Turner Turnpike. I don't know whether they even have them anymore.

HARVEY 00:01:39

What [was] it like growing up in Oklahoma?

NORMAN 00:01:43

Very crowded, isolated out in the country; we grew up in rural county. We was five miles from the closest store. And so growing up every other year I would have a brother or sister. So when it got to we having nine of us it was quite [extended] -- And growing up with my stepfather-- he came to be my stepfather -- he had this family, they was kind of like laughing all the time, but I found out later the reason they was laughing all the time: They was drinking all the time. You know, but they seemed to have fun. You know, and I didn't sure feel like that on the inside, even as a young kid. I was reminded several times that "that's not your dad" by his his brothers and sisters, and, you know, occasionally they'd be used the word "bastard child," you know, growing up, which I still didn't understand what all that stuff was, and- But I know that I felt bad, so it must have been about me. You know, so I didn't couldn't tell, one way or another, whether it was directly at me or this was just the way they was and, come to find out later on as growing up-- That's just the way they was: just kind of a dysfunctional family. But together as a whole...

HARVEY 00:03:17

How does that make you feel?

NORMAN 00:03:19

Well, at that time, I felt very...different. I had the last name that was different from my brothers and sisters. So I felt different but it was never talked about in the household. My mother grew up in a household where she was born out of wedlock. So her stepdad used to hold that over her head all the time. So my stepdad and my mother didn't come-- it didn't happen. But I knew it was there because I felt it, you know, I felt a difference of family at large versus the family that my mother got married into, versus her mother, which was my grandmother. It was two different, you know. And the, just growing up kind of feeling like: "Oh OK. " And-- But I always wanted to get to that place where I had this laughter in my life, you know. And even though I kind of didn't like the people, didn't think they liked me, I felt that they had something--laughter about them.

HARVEY 00:04:40

What's it like growing up in the community outside? That is, you know, was there segregation? What relations [existed] with the white folks? What was your experience there?

NORMAN 00:04:50

Very much, you know, and we didn't pay too much attention. We knew it there, so we grew up in it. I remember the next door neighbor down about three miles away, he had this big cattle ranch and my dad usually would have four, five cows like that. And the cow would have a calf and, and that neighbor that lived down the way he would come by and he said, "Oh, I'll give you \$20 for that cow and calf." Well, my dad will let him have it! To me, I thought-- I didn't understand it at that time, but that was the way that they got credit at the banks and the stores is by the neighbors', right, doings, you know, the white neighbors. And other than that, it was, I went to school with most of them eventually, but I just, it was different. I felt better on that part than I felt on the inside part as far as the family because you kind of know where you was and stuff.

HARVEY 06:02

Are you saying that there was, like, this white guy was sort of taking advantage in some way?

NORMAN 06:12

Yes, I-- That's the way they lived down there. Yeah, it was. From the way I looked at it, it was different. I didn't have no way of basing it on some because I was in it myself. When I was old enough to leave and come back I seen just how different and how wrong that was. I was-- I was very-- But they lived that way.

HARVEY 06:39

Was it like an implied threat? If he didn't-- If you're--

NORMAN 06:42

No, I don't--

HARVEY 06:43

--If you didn't sell the cow, would something happen?

NORMAN 06:45

I don't even think they even give it a second thought. They just did it. They just did it. And for me, I just didn't understand why. As myself and my brothers and sisters grew up, we was kind of outspoken about "Why is this happening? What's this about?" And so: "Well, you don't-- You don't want to know." You know-- stuff like that you would always be kind of shuttled off, not getting in a deep conversation about stuff that goes on, what's going on.

HARVEY 00:07:21

Did you go to school with white kids?

NORMAN 00:07:23

Um-hm. Yeah, I started off with a Black school that was from one to five and then we separated and went to [a]white school, and it was kind of different. It was like we was there on one side of the wall and they was on the other side of the wall, and then we got to know each other. And for some reason, we kind of-- We fit in, we fit in. And we didn't have too much troubles or anything like that. Had a little-- a few scuffles here now but it wasn't nothing that--

HARVEY 00:07:58

What kind of scuffles? How did that happen?

NORMAN 00:08:00

You know, when you're playing ball or just horsing around or something like that, or somebody might challenge somebody. It wasn't too much fighting or stuff like that. It was just standing toe to toe fist fighting. And "Okay, I got enough" and that would be it, you know-- When we grew up, it wasn't about pulling out an Uzi or a knife or something; that would be it. So that was okay. It was okay. I wasn't too good at school. I didn't find out that I had dyslexia until I was in my 40s. I could read stuff back better than I can forward. And time to time would sign my name backwards. And I didn't understand that that's why I felt like I was different, that I didn't belong. I was different. Nobody explained that, no test was given for that kind of behavior when you're coming up in the country, rural area.

HARVEY 00:09:06

Did you go to high school down there?

NORMAN 00:09:08

Yeah, I went to high school. I didn't complete it, though, because at that time I was playing ball and everything like that and then I got introduced, prior to that, I got introduced to this elixir: hot water with bourbon and sugar in it, you know. And that's what you would cure colds and stuff [with]. You would have the bourbon and "hot toddy" they would say. Well, when I had that I felt relief. I felt like I was okay. I was laughing, I was laughing inside and the world was different. So that was--

So when I went to school and stuff and started doing sports and stuff, you know, teenagers get together and you smoke cigarettes. You go steal a bottle or somebody older'd buy you a bottle. And that seemed to be alright. That's where the laughter came from. I know now where the laughter come from for my in-laws. They had-- It must be that! You know. I couldn't tell whether it was or not but I know it made me feel good.

HARVEY 00:10:32

So if I understand it, it finally made you feel better the way they seem to be functioning in a better, happier way?

NORMAN 00:10:41

Yeah, I never was, I guess that being in recovery, I think that's what started off my alcoholism in that particular area, you know, finding something to get out of myself.

HARVEY 00:10:55

Yeah. We will come back to that, obviously. Do you go to California at that point? Or when did you come West?

NORMAN 00:11:08

I came to the West in 1961, I believe. And I was getting into a little trouble.

HARVEY 00:11:17

What kind of trouble?

NORMAN 00:11:18

The real trouble was I would be driving people's cars and running stop light signs, and then I had a situation where I cashed a check, I didn't know what was going to work. I took this check and I wrote "\$10" on it and they cashed it, you know, and I did that two or three times and they caught me, you know. And it was sort of like, "Oh!" Well, everybody knew everybody. So they just called my grandfather and said, "We got your grandson down here." Well, I didn't, I didn't know. Right today, they still have a checkbook in most banks in Oklahoma, where you can just go in, and if you got an account in there, you just make out a check and take it to the counter and cash it. I didn't know. I'm young, I didn't know. Right after that, when I was about 17, they said, "Well, maybe you should send him to California to live with his uncle." And part of that-- I didn't find out until later on that part of the embarrassment and the shame and possibly me getting sent to prison or getting killed or something like that. They probably took that into consideration, you know. So I-- By this time, I was kind of moving into that area. Like they say, when you growing up smelling under your armpits, you know, you're growing up, you know, you get facial hairs and stuff like that. Teenager, you know, So, that's one of the things.

HARVEY 13:02

So you come out in 1966--

NORMAN 00:13:04

No, '61.

HARVEY 00:13:06

Sixty-one you came to live with--sorry with your--

NORMAN 00:13:10

With my uncle.

HARVEY 00:13:11

With your uncle.

NORMAN 00:13:12

Yeah, he drove. He came down, and put some stuff in the car, and came back, and I've been out here ever since.

HARVEY 00:13:22

What was your uncle doing? What was his work?

NORMAN 00:13:25

He worked for Laguna Honda Hospital. He was an orderly or a nurse out there I believe. And the lifestyle that I had left in Oklahoma, I found with him. Him and his roommate, which all of us were about six years apart. And we went as brothers and we drank a lot and had a lot of women over, you know. And I'm still not 20 yet. But it was a different life. I'd never known any life like that. I came from Oklahoma with these long sideburns, talking about like I do now, like I'm from the south. And it was great. Great.

HARVEY 00:14:13

And this is San Francisco, right?

NORMAN 00:14:15

San Francisco, yeah.

HARVEY 00:14:18

Okay. When you're in your early 20s what work were you doing?

NORMAN 00:14:23

My early 20s, I came to California and the only thing I did was when I got here I started at a printing service company down on Bush [Street]. Used to be named Copycats. And we would deliver various stuff all over the downtown areas. And, and, you know, you used to have to be on the bicycle. Well, I couldn't ride a bicycle that good, so I would park mine to the side and just walk. Well, I learned about that, and then after about a year of that, a couple years, and I moved across the street to Copy Service, where I became a cameraman and I did body layouts for Macy's and Christmas edition stuff like. So that was basically it, until I became a longshoreman in 1969.

HARVEY 00:15:25

There was no union? Was there a union shop?

NORMAN 00:15:28

No, no, no. No, it was just a job and prior to that, I would go to the carwash and I might wash a few cars. It was very limited money when I got here for the first several years.

HARVEY 00:15:44

And when did you encounter the ILWU?

NORMAN 00:15:49

Nineteen sixty-nine.

HARVEY 00:15:50

Nineteen sixty-nine. Okay. They took people in in 1969. How did you manage to rig that?

NORMAN 00:16:00

Well, I was told by this lady friend that I was with. And her ex-husband was a longshoreman. And he said if [you] gave me \$300 he'd get me on. Well, they had a lot of stuff going on back there. But if they didn't pick me, he would give it back. So I gave him \$300. And I got picked.

HARVEY 00:16:25

Really? Did you ever get your 300 back?

NORMAN 00:16:28

No, if I didn't get picked, I would get it back. And then the next six years, I wanted my \$300 back! Because I didn't work!

HARVEY 00:16:39

Oh, you didn't work?

NORMAN 00:16:39

No. I came in as a B [Man]. From '69 to '75, we had very limited work. We probably worked three days out of the year, on a couple of years. It was--They hired us [to work] container freight stations and--

HARVEY 00:17:01

Let me ask you something. Who is the person who asked you for 300 bucks to set you up?

NORMAN 00:17:06

This guy down there? Well, the big guy that was down there at the longshore was George [?Smalley?], I believe. George [?Smalley?] was his name.

HARVEY 00:17:09

[?Smalley?]

NORMAN 00:17:15

[?Smalley?] Anybody that's early, knows by George Small and-- And but the guy Trotter was the one that I knew. That I was, at that time, married to his ex wife, which I got my youngest daughter by. Which is--Oof! She's 59 years old. That's my youngest. So prior to all this, I had been married, and short-lived. This is the longest one I've been in now which just made 14 years. So I've got a few kids.

HARVEY 00:17:59

Yeah. So what was your first day on the waterfront like? Can you recall?

NORMAN 00:18:08

First day was kind of like getting to know. Signing up, and I think the first week we got a coffee job over in Oakland down on Market Street. They had a terminal down there. I went there and I worked three days [of] coffee there. [The] ship shifted to San Francisco and I worked four days there.

HARVEY 00:18:42

What was it like, working coffee? What was that like?

NORMAN 00:18:44

I had never experienced-- Well, remember I'm about 147 pounds and them sacks was 200 pounds. And you're being coordinated with your partner far as picking it up and throwing it which is-- I had learned all that stuff, you know, and then I had this big old lesion that came up on my left hand, so I was literally using my right hand hook doing that. So the boss thought I was labor faking. So he told my partner, he says, "You go down and get the pig ears and shake it and let it fill up on my end." And he was determined that I couldn't make it, so for seven days, I throwed coffee with one arm. And I made it so it was-- And then for the next three years, I wish I had done coffee stuff, but we didn't get any work at all.

HARVEY 00:19:48

You didn't get any work? Okay. How did you survive without getting any work?

NORMAN 00:19:54

Well, we had the previous unemployment from them previous jobs that got down to \$39 a week. At that time I was staying--when me and my wife got divorced, I was just surviving some kind of way. I think I was staying with a family member or something like that.

HARVEY 00:20:25

Okay. When did you get to become an A card guy?

NORMAN 00:20:29

Nineteen seventy-five.

HARVEY 00:20:31

Okay.

NORMAN 00:20:33

And it was on my birthday, September 22, when I started work.

HARVEY 00:20:39

Okay.

NORMAN 00:20:40

As a B and [then] an A.

HARVEY 00:20:49

Working on the waterfront, what product did you like to work? What was a good one to work?

NORMAN 00:20:59

Back then, they had some good hold jobs and stuff where you could go into [the] hold and fill up the pallet and whatnot with food and stuff. I didn't too particularly like to work steel, but I learned how to work it.

HARVEY 00:21:21

Why didn't you like it?

NORMAN 00:21:22

It's very dangerous. It's very dangerous down on that [as] far as getting caught between "in the bight"--which I didn't understand what that was; being "in the swing"-- I didn't understand what that was. But I came to learn that watching people get hurt and almost getting killed myself, that when an old-timer tells you to move, you in the wrong spot. You better move. And so that was good. It was after you start working, it was it was okay.

HARVEY 00:21:59

How did you almost get killed?

NORMAN 00:22:02

They was-- We was taking some grape stakes out of the hatch, and they put them-- they was on the counter like pallet boards, you know, and they would put them on the pontoon, which they would bring it up. They would put it on with a forklift and take it off with a forklift. Well, the yard falls broke. And as he was heisting up, the guy told me, "Don't stand there." I moved and just as-- When I moved [the] thing broke and swung back in the combing and almost got me. So I said, "Okay." There again, it was a job that I didn't think I belonged in. But the-- I think the power of being a longshoreman and not actually knowing was--seemed to be catching or something when you go and apply for credit and stuff. So it took me a while to kind of understand and become a longshoreman.

HARVEY 00:23:12

Yeah, yeah. When did you, about how long did it take for that to happen?

NORM 00:23:17

20 years

HARVEY 00:23:20

(Laugh) Until you really felt you were really good at it?

NORMAN 00:23:23

Well, I was looking at doing the wrong thing. I was always looking for people that was doing less than I was. I would get with that group, those groups was drinking before and after. It become a routine, you know. The

people that was doing the right thing, I would look at them as "squares." I didn't have no idea what I was doing, or thinking, you know, but it seemed like, there again, from my childhood today is another situation that I didn't think I'd fit in. And it was very hard for the transformation.

HARVEY 24:06

And that took you 20 years?

NORMAN 24:08

20 years. I didn't adjust until 20 years.

HARVEY 24:15

You've mentioned drinking to feel better, to feel happier, to feel a little more comfortable in the world.

NORMAN 24:25

Yeah.

HARVEY 24:26

Was that still a problem during all these years during the time you're on the waterfront?

NORMAN 24:30

That's the people that I met and was more gravitated to, that drink. It seemed to me that you would have laughter, conversation, more fluid than you would when you wasn't drinking. And it makes you feel like you could do anything, said anything. And with a little bit of consequences at first, when you starting it. Later on, it became a problem.

HARVEY 00:25:04

Yeah. How much did it make it an issue in being a longshoreman? You know, having a--drinking a bit too much?

NORMAN 00:25:21

It was like you get with a group of people and-- Because when I came and we would always get together and we would get together and pool our money together to get food, and drinks, and stuff. So we 'came a group in the hall, and so drank-- And a lot of us just kept drinking, you know. And so while my drinking tenure, I seemed to gravitate towards the person that was dodging work and drinking and-- I never did do too much other stuff until my later years. And that was it! You know, it was like I didn't have-- Even though I had this good job when I was grown up now, I had family I mean I just still didn't fit in. Didn't feel like I fit in.

HARVEY 00:26:27

Yeah, but you were able to do the job.

NORMAN 00:26:29

Yeah.

HARVEY 00:26:30

Even though--

NORMAN 00:26:30

I done the job.

HARVEY 00:26:31

Okay.

NORMAN 00:26:32

Reluctantly, sometimes but I did it you know, because I had to do it to get paid, you know?

HARVEY 00:26:37

Yeah. Yeah. You never got tapped by the military at all when you were a young guy? You missed out on that?

NORMAN 00:26:47

No, I was slated to go in before I left Oklahoma. I took the test and they classified me. "3C" 3C.

HARVEY 27:00

Okay. How come? Do you know why?

NORMAN 27:02

Well, it was that dyslexia stuff that's the only reason I could figure, because I could take tests and do stuff. And it would take me longer to take that test and so that's what they qualified for me as. So, when I got to California, I re-- I went down and, and that's what they classified me as "3C." So I said, "Okay." And at one time if you had responsibility for kids and stuff like that, they wouldn't take you, to be successful. At least that's what I was told.

HARVEY 27:41

Okay, I'll ask you this one because it kind of fits in. Do you recall the 1971 strike?

NORMAN 27:47

Yes.

HARVEY 27:49

By that time, you were not yet an A card guy, I guess. I don't think you were. I think you're still a B man, right?

NORMAN 27:55

Yes, I was still a B [man] and it was like-- The unity of bringing people together in unity and it worked because we all showed up at our spots, some of us bought food, some of them bought various stuff. And we stayed there. We was kind of like-- And then we had one--We had two boards in the hall: "skilled" and "unskilled" and you might get out once or twice in the month. We was out on 144 days, I believe. Well, right at the end of that, when they seen that they was going to settle, possibly not getting anything, those same people in the hall that seemed to -- Was holding us back: "A versus B" started again. And I kept looking at that "An Injury to One is an Injury to All." I kept looking at that, you know, and I kept going to meetings and I'd hear them arguing and stuff and

the next day they'd be drinking or working together. And I couldn't figure out: "What was this stuff going on? What type of-- What am I getting myself into? " You know, so? So that was interesting.

HARVEY 00:29:29

Can you paint it a little more? I don't-- It's a little hard for me to follow it for some reason.

NORMAN 00:29:37

The work thing: When we was on strike, everybody was union. We was as one. When we came off of strike-- prior to going on strike, we was-- The B person was actually nobody. We was just like the casuals that's there now.

HARVEY 00:30:00

Yeah.

NORMAN 00:30:00

Everybody getting two jobs to none. And it kind of seemed like that shouldn't be right. You know, I thought that that-- you know-- And my continuous seeing things like this led me to believe that this is not what it ought to be. But over the years, it's been-- people-- same thing over and over again, you know.

HARVEY 00:30:35

So you're saying that went away during the strike and then it came back after?

NORMAN 00:30:39

It went away because we had camaraderie, but like I say, somebody-- Everybody showed up, they shared with you, they'd talk and we got the A and B on the same picket line and there wasn't no squabbling. Everybody was doing and-- They even had more money than the B, so they would bring and-- At that time, I had another part time job-- I was working in a chicken store so I bring some chicken and stuff like that. So it was doing good. You know? That part, and then when we went back to work we started over again.

HARVEY 00:30:39

Yeah.

NORMAN 00:30:39

It got like "I got mine. You get yours." Well, there wasn't no way of getting mine, because I wasn't up to-- In 1975 was when I became an A person. I had an option to go in a gang and I think I went in a gang, I stayed in the gang for five to six years, I guess.

HARVEY 00:31:43

So you were steady at that--

NORMAN 00:31:45

No, I've went in the gang-- I worked on it when the gang worked.

HARVEY 00:31:48

Okay.

NORMAN 00:31:48

And so when I when I got on the waterfront, they had about 80 or 90 gangs, because it was all hold work and stuff like. But they hired us for containers. Well, those freight stations closed down. So we had all these people, or a few of us went to work at those freight stations but the rest of us was in the hall. And it was kind of like, "Whoa, this is."

HARVEY 00:32:24

When you're in this gang, were they mostly Black guys or were they white guys and Black guys?

NORMAN 00:32:30

It was a mixture white and Black, because the first gang boss, it was a big Black guy, call him "Mr. President", because his name was President. Roosevelt President, was his name. And he was a guy that he reminds me of actually being back in Oklahoma.

HARVEY 00:32:55

How so?

NORMAN 00:32:55

So he was a good guy, but he'd say, "Y'all hurry up and do this, here come the boss! Here come the walking boss!" You know, and it was sort of like-- And we had another guy in the hold [?unintelligible?] that would fight like being-- Oh, it would be on then! You know, "Get out the hole [hold?] [?worm?]" And a few choice words would be said. Not by me, but by other people 'cause the ink on my book is still wet. So I couldn't do too much, but it was interesting and-- So--And then--

HARVEY 00:33:32

Then it was another guy?

NORMAN 00:33:36

Then, yeah, I've went to another gang. That was another gang. That's where I learned to do drinkin' and druggin' and stuff like that. Because we were a little more open about it and we kind of did our own thing. And then it came to getting hurt in 19-- uh--- 85, I think and then just becoming completely oblivious to the world I was drinkin' and druggin' and--

HARVEY 00:34:15

How'd you get hurt?

NORMAN 00:34:16

I fell off a ledge and hurt my back. And so I was off for a little while, and got a few dollars for-- I already had it spent before I got it too, though-- And then I was off work for about seven, eight months, I guess. Other than that, still adjusting. You know, a kid from Oklahoma still adjusting to grown folk life.

HARVEY 00:35:02

When and why did you decide not to do drinking and to change your pattern?

NORMAN 00:35:10

I got sick and tired of being sick and tired. I would have-- You know, this camaraderie we had-- Everybody would chip in on a bottle, or somebody would always have a bottle at the car. And I remember putting a couple of dollars on a bottle and passing it around and, and at the end I put a quarter in on it and I'd tried to drink the whole bottle when it got to me. I had crossed that invisible line of becoming an alcoholic. And some drugs and then for a short while, when I got hurt. I had a little money and it all went up in smoke. New friends, new substance that I didn't know nothing about and got involved [in]-- And then in 1987, I was through. I was "sick and tired of being sick and tired," but I didn't know what to do. I had a friend called George Cobb. He sent me-- There was another friend that was in the gang and he had went to [?DUFIS?]. And they told me, "You should have George send you up to this program." Well, I didn't know what he's talking about. And then it came my time to go, and so I asked George to send me up to [?DUFRY?] so he sent me up to Campobello up in Santa Rosa, out in the middle of these cow pastures. So it really did remind me [of] Oklahoma--all these cow pastures. The hicks up there, I said, "Oh no!" It was not the first time that I got--went the the 30 days. And I got some information and that's about where I was. I was still, in my head, I was kind of a chameleon and a clown at the same time. Still looking for identity and then, a year later, I went-- I got out of that program and I went back to the same people, the same places and-- People were still trying to help me out though, and I still didn't get it. I looked at George Cobb as somebody that was getting paid to put us in there. So what did he know about it? What did he care about it? I didn't know that he was an alcoholic in recovery. I didn't know that. I just still had my understanding of life. And then, until 1988, when I went into my second program, I was then "sick and tired of being sick and tired." It was a surrender that came to me that I knew that I'd never have to drink and use it again. But to this day, I haven't. It's been 31 years ago.

HARVEY 00:38:25

That's great. Was the program in place by then? Was George the head of the program by then?

NORMAN 00:38:30

Yeah, yeah he was.

HARVEY 00:38:36

And then, after that, how long did you stay on the waterfront as a longshore worker before you got involved in the [Alcohol and Drug Recovery] Program yourself?

NORMAN 00:38:45

For the next 14 years, I volunteered-- I did things that I normally wouldn't do.

HARVEY 00:38:55

Yeah?

NORMAN 00:38:56

And I would lash--Go to Matson and lash. There was no job too hard for me; it was like I was willing to do a day's work. And while I was doing this, I would look at other people thinking they should be willing to do it too! But I'm the one that's in recovery, they wasn't, you know. So I just kind of-- So when I started off it was kind of like: "Oh, everybody should be doing this stuff here. This is good!" You know, but no it ain't the way it works. So it was a transformation of being-- meeting George and really him coming to that second program to actually set down and talk to me. And he'd say, "How you doing?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "You're gonna be alright." So when I got out of there, well he became my sponsor until he died and that was two years ago. And we've been all over the world, just about. I enjoy life. When I went-- Prior to that is when I got out-- As one of the areas-- I became instructor, tractor and lift instructor.

Well, I know George. George knew the guy at PMA [Pacific Maritime Association] 'cause he had put his son in there. And I used to think that that's why they put me in the position of being lead. But it wasn't. It was something about the guy seeing that I was willing to work, help people out. And off and on for 14 years, it was the best job I think that I could ever have. Its been being able to interact, talked about-- When I do my lectures, trainings, before I'd get started I would talk about: "You in a job now that you don't never have to get on your knees anymore." You know, "Work all day, enjoy the day, go home to your family." And most of that stuff was young people that I trained because we became a family. It was really important that no two people was alike when you come to training them how to [inaudible] trouble. I thought it was until I had to do my Serenity Prayer and go to meetings and talk about what my challenge was. When I didn't have the challenge. I'd say, "You don't have no challenge. You just got a job!" You know-- And sure enough, I was able to find out how to help people differently and at the same time personal. The women was very hard, but I knew that. So it was something that I had to do different to try to help them versus the men-- And so it work. When I see them on the street in another city or another state they-- That's my taxi driver. They introduce me to their families. I think that's one of the best things that--That's me becoming a longshoreman.

HARVEY 00:42:43

Is that when you felt you were finally fitting in somewhere?

NORMAN 00:42:48

It was a wonderful feeling to be able to give something back, because see I've been given two programs. I've been given to two programs and I didn't understand the cost of what the people actually meant. But I met some good people in the program that seemed to be there to help people out like me, that wasn't in there for money. And it kind of rubbed off, you know, and I said, "Wow, this is strange. People actually do this for somebody like me." See, I always thought that I wasn't worthy of certain things. So when people start doing stuff for me, I said, "Wow! You would do that for me?"

HARVEY 00:43:32

Did you kind of get the first of that insight that time George Cobbs sat down with you?

NORMAN 00:43:38

Yeah, yeah.

HARVEY 00:43:39

You began to realize: "George Cobb is not in this just for the money."

NORMAN 00:43:42

Yeah. yeah. That was the second program I went through. He made the trip up to where I was at Serenity House up in Napa County. And we sit and talked and even though I-- Stuff was going on up there, it didn't bother me because I was there for me. And he told me that "your recovery depends on you, not these other people." And it kind of stuck. It was kind of like, "Okay." So, like I say, until he died two years ago, we were just like brothers. His daughters even call me "uncle" now and you know-- And a lot of people looked at us-- "Where's George?" They would look at George and "Where's Norman?" We was tight, you know. We helped a lot of people. Helped a lot of people.

HARVEY 00:44:41

You had that job instructing for 14 years--

NORMAN 00:44:45

Off and on for over 14 years.

HARVEY 00:44:46

What did you do after that?

NORMAN 00:44:48

I went directly to the alcohol and drug program in 2004 when George retired.

HARVEY 00:44:55

When George retired, okay, that's when you did it.

NORMAN 00:45:00

And I did it 'til 2011, when I became 65. Twenty-three years clean and sober, and 42 years on the job.

HARVEY 00:45:16

When you were with the program, what stands out to you? Like somebody who you helped a lot, who made the grade, or somebody who did not? What kind of stories do you recall?

NORMAN 00:45:35

I remember George, telling me early on: "Do not take this stuff-- Do not take it personally. Some people is going to relapse, some maybe die, some gonna get it. You are not responsible for their failure or their success. You're just there to help." And that's what I remember. I'm just there to help.

HARVEY 00:45:58

Yeah, that's great.

NORMAN 00:45:59

I wasn't a counselor, I wasn't a-- I was there to listen to you if you wanted help to put you in a facility.

HARVEY 00:46:11

Okay? Anything specifics that you recall like any particular case where it came out well or perhaps didn't?

NORMAN 00:46:20

Not too many-- I-- Some of the people that I used to drink and use with-- They would put some of them in the program. Some of the family members of some of the people I trained, I was able to put them in a program. For a few years there, I had nothing but adolescent people. Very difficult. And all of our treatment facilities was in Utah. Various places fall away. It was very hard on the parents as well as the kid, especially if it was a Black kid.

HARVEY 00:47:04

Yeah, were these teenage people? Were they longshore workers? Who were they children of?

NORMAN 00:47:11

Children of. And when they started doing better, a few of them came by the office and said, "This the man that put you in treatment that saved your life." And I would meet them. So sometimes, I would do this stuff over the phone where they wanted help right away. I would get permission from the benefits plan that they had coverage. And then I would find somebody to-- where I could send them. Sometime when Utah you got [inaudible]-- And you don't know whether should put him on the plane or don't have time to take them-- Well, I found people come pick up kids, and they would take them and they give them a choice: You can go on the plane and listen to your VCR, headphones, or we could go in the van. And you could scream and holler all the way. Well, they had a technique that was just addressing what their job was-- To get you there to the treatment. And I said, "Wow. That's pretty good." So a few things like that happened. One of the ADRP persons that works in our area, I put her through George. While training her during tractor training, I suggested to her to go see George. She did, so she got 26 years clean and sober. So that kind of stuff.

HARVEY 00:49:03

That's nice. Did "Big Bob" [ILWU President Robert McEllrath] ever get involved with your program and with you?

NORMAN 00:49:12

Big Bob was receptive to anything and everything we did because he know he was helping people out. He was the most generous person of recognition when you would see him, because he knew what you did, even though he might be reeking of alcohol sometimes, but he would always make a point to acknowledge you because of the job you did with people. Helping people out, and that-- I used to see people doing with George, and I said, "Oh George is big stuff!"

HARVEY 00:49:49

He was what?

NORMAN 00:49:49

He was big stuff. But it was that fact that he had a way of helping people out and his resignation from that you know, so-- So when people recognize me, I'm thankful because it came from following George.

HARVEY 00:50:07

Yeah. Were you ever involved in Union politics at all?

NORMAN 00:50:17

Not too much. I got on the Grievance Committee a couple times. I ran for dispatcher, I never did make that. Grievance Committee was kind of like-- It was okay. It was too cliquish. I just think that a person should be judged on what they did. Their own merits or what they did versus-- Not because I don't want you to-- A lot of stuff like that, you know. I didn't stay in that very long, you know-- Because I went into the program in 1988-- my second program in 1988. So when I came out and '88-- Well, '89 I started doing the tractor training. And so while in my drinking days, I used to try to run for office and stuff. But I am kind of glad they didn't put me in there! They didn't vote for me for the type of person I was, I guess! [laughs] So. But it was good. Everything was good. It was a life worth living.

HARVEY 00:51:38

Let me ask you, you've retired in 2011. And then why do you become so active in the PCPA?

NORMAN 00:51:48

George was the president. I became a member. They put me on the Executive Board right away and Ralph Rucker, when he passed, they put me into Vice-President and I've been there for three, four years, three or four years.

HARVEY 00:52:12

Does that continue to satisfy your sense of belonging as opposed to not belonging? As it seems it was before you retired?

NORMAN 00:52:23

The same thing-- It's sort of like I lost that sense of not belonging when I came into recovery, and it's sort of like, I might not belong here, but it doesn't make me any "less than." You understand? So persons were places where go and stuff might not be totally invited, but I'm there anyhow, you know--

HARVEY 00:52:53

This program had a very big effect on you---

NORMAN 00:52:58

This program had a major effect on me. It kind of gave me a new identity-- my true identity-- as far as who I am. I'm a man among men and I enjoy being who I am, you know. Might not be perfect, but I might not be the best thing either, but I'm comfortable with who I am.

HARVEY 00:53:30

Conor, did you have some questions?

CONOR CASEY 00:53:36

When you started attending the program, how long has that been around? Were you one of the people who started it or started running it after?

NORMAN 00:53:44

No, George Cobb started in 1979. He-- The program actually started in 1981. They sent him to-- They sent him to school. Him and this other guy from the Teamsters. They said unions would have to have representation. So he started in '81. And when I came, I was one in the eighties that he put in. I went to my first program 1988-- '87. And then my second program a year later, I went into my second and hopefully my last program and that's 31 years ago.

HARVEY 00:54:26

There is an oral history with George that's in the ILWU Oral History collection in San Francisco. Kind of an extensive history of the program.

CONOR 00:54:35

Gene [Vrana] told me to ask you about it. [laughs]

NORMAN 00:54:45

Oh, Gene?

CONOR 00:54:46

Yeah.

NORMAN 00:54:50

He's a good guy. They was pioneers. Gene is one of the pioneers, which I just come to know that a few years ago.

HARVEY 55:03

Gene Vrana?

NORMAN 00:55:04

Yeah. I never knew that until a few years ago. Something about him-- he's quiet and kind and stuff. You seem to pick that up from people that's in the program that's going to meet it. You'd have some there's not going to be disease. You're not: "Oh, wow. I know what you got." You know, but is it all [inaudible] you know--

HARVEY 00:55:32

Do you know what Gene's role was? Where he fits in there?

NORMAN 00:55:38

Gene's just in recovery.

HARVEY 00:55:41

Vrana?

NORMAN 00:55:42

Yeah. He's just in recovery. I like to say I've got 31 [years]. He might have 35 or 36 [years in recovery]. You know, he'd been there a long time. And, and the reason I asked, I found that out, he might have told me but this lady that I was going to meeting with. She said this guy was a longshoreman, he lived in Berkeley, his wife was going to school or taught at Berkeley up there. And he used to go to a meeting and he told me that I was going to be all right. Now, she's got 35 years sobriety, or 34. She said, "I just want to thank that guy, cuz I didn't think I had a chance." And I said, "What is the name?" "Oh. Gene something. Jimmy or Gene." "Is he a longshoreman?" And then she said the last name was a "V." So I just happened to ask him. I said, "Did you ever go to meetings in Berkeley?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "This lady knows you from 35 years ago." So I go, "Wow."

That's that contagious fellowship that we have, you know, throughout the world, going to vacation and home and taking off and going to a meeting if-- and this is what George told me-- If you don't have no problem as far as communicating with your family, they're not pouring alcohol all over you, just enjoy the family. A lot of people go on vacation and they spend most of their time in meetings where you're not actually visiting. And that's understandable because there's a lot of dysfunctional families that's really not back together yet. My brothers and sisters, it's just like we're still little kids when I go home, you know, the laughter, the food, and, you know-- It's just good. And since I've been clean and sober, I was able to be there when my mother took her last breath. And this man that I called my stepdad [I] recognized him that he's the only dad that I'll ever know. I seen him take his last breath. So I was present. And my emotion was not being "strong" for the rest of the field. It was what I learned from the program: What I feel I must let you see what I feel, or feel what I feel. Because as a kid, they wouldn't take me to funerals because the people in the funerals would be emotionally upset, emotionally this and that. And I would-- I didn't wanna cry, I didn't want to-- I would internally take that stuff in, so when I'd get home, and the next three or four days I'd have these vicious nightmares. So they said, "Leave him at home. Don't bring him to no funeral no more."

Again I thought I was different; I felt different. There was a part of me that-- Now-- I go to so many funerals now it's just like. I really see now that going home part is a special occasion for the family members. It don't mean they have to get along. But sending a loved one home is a special-- you know-- so--

CONOR 00:59:29

As far as the grief, would you say you have to "pay" it eventually. So you might as well feel it at the moment because you're gonna have to deal with it later?

NORMAN 00:59:40

Yeah. They said, "Man ain't supposed to cry." I don't know where they got that written down at. But-- So--

HARVEY 00:59:52

Was Gene at all directly involved in the program when George was running it?

NORMAN 00:59:57

I couldn't tell you, I really don't know. I-- I don't, I don't know what it was about. Probably, some of that stuff-- The stuff was. Everybody don't know. You do no program, being an alcoholic or an addict. That's why they call it "anonymous."

HARVEY 01:00:22

Yeah.

NORMAN 01:00:22

Yeah. And I've never knew Gene was until, one day, he told me that they have-- across from [the ILWU International [offices]]--they have a fireman's meeting at 12 o'clock, but he never did say what I ghosted everyone every day of what they just said they had one. So I just said "Okay." He's the kind of guy like George and him that's got that certain attitude about themselves that people don't mind being around. So he's a good guy.

HARVEY 01:01:14

He's sort of a mentor of mine inside the union, too. Do you have any questions?

CONOR 01:01:19

Do you know if they're, if there's any other unions that have programs like this or is this one of the first ones to do that? It seems so important.

NORMAN 01:01:26

All programs-- The Teamsters have a program. Back in the '70s, all of the unions had to start looking at instead of firing an individual, you had to get a program to help them first. Teamsters is about the only program that has "one bite of the apple." Longshoremen has four. The bus drivers have two or three or something like that. But George helped the MUNI [San Francisco Municipal Transit District] peer system. He was on the board at Delancey Street, St. Anthony's. All those type of--- George learned about the people that administer treatment and help other people. I have been exposed to a lot of those people sitting down with those people that have

authors and stuff like that. Like this guy here, I didn't know George said he want me to meet Harvey. I said, "Oh, Okay." I didn't know who Harvey is. He said, "He's a great author." But I didn't read so I didn't know what an author was or another like that. Or you know, just jokingly. You know, and come to know him. He's a good guy. You know, a lot of these folks that we go to and very glad to see him now. He really does a lot of good work. Good work.

HARVEY 01:03:10

Being pretty generous there.

NORMAN 01:03:13

Oh, that's the truth. I probably missed it by not giving you enough.

HARVEY 01:03:19

I was going to ask you what we missed. Did we miss anything big? Did we miss a major issue of some sort in our discussion?

NORMAN 01:03:25

No, other than the fact that I am a proud father of 4 kids, 17 grandkids, and 21 great grandkids. That would have never took place if I was still drinking and using. I have one son and three daughters. And my daughters had daughters look like-- So the daughters had kids and they start having--- So-- And the remarkable thing about it is just like I've got three sets of kids. And that time of coming to California, getting on the waterfront, I think I went through one actual marriage and two common law marriages with inside of three or four years. And my drinking and everything and my attitude was so bad they- We didn't- They didn't want nothing to-- "We don't want no child support from you just stay away from us." You know. And pretty soon, everything got all right. The two exes work with each other at the post office. I was able to see my ex-- one of my ex wives take her last breath. And we've got two kids. One of my sons, which is down on the waterfront. He just made it as a casual.

HARVEY 01:04:58

Oh, that's good.

NORMAN 01:04:59

And then his sister--her son just made it, which is my grandson, on the waterfront. They just remarkable. And then my favorite girl, which is 59-- she's just--- And then I got another daughter down in San Jose. She's the same age as my son: 54 or 53. All I know is they over 50 all except that one.

HARVEY 01:05:04

But you got married 14 years ago?

NORMAN 01:05:39

To the woman I'm with today, Deborah. She was one of the persons that we trained in doing tractor training and stuff. She was one. She was probably the least likely one that I would be with. You know? But just lately something came up and we were together; I'm looking around and another lady said, "Well, why are you pick her and not me?" I said, "Well, I wasn't looking for no wife then! Nor am I looking for one now! I don't know how I got here!" That's a running joke I have with them when I see him, you know?

HARVEY 01:06:14

Yeah.

NORMAN 01:06:15

Yeah, and so I guess what it's been a factor if I was still drinking and using: Me and this wife wouldn't be together. She'd been through a lot. She's got three kids and three marriages in order that-- She had three actual marriages and two of them was physical, you know?

HARVEY 01:06:45

Oh. Abusive people?

NORMAN 01:06:47

Oh, yeah. One of them, the first one, was abusive. The second one was-- My wife had some insurance on herself, so the second one decided he was going to kill her or something like that. And then she was married to another guy that-- So, but she's doing good. Like she has 14 years. It's been long as I've been married and it's okay. Sometimes you-- at my age-- you marry for companionship of a person: that you do things together. We've been on cruises. We've been on a lot of stuff, vacations and stuff, and we seem to do that, okay. Even though she might be several steps in front of me, I'm there. And I don't mind her taking them several steps in

front of me. "Just go ahead. I'll catch up with you." And it's okay. Just like today, she goes out-- yesterday and today-- She goes out and: "I'll see you when I get back." "Where you going?" "I'm going to look over the city." "Okay."

CONOR 01:08:13

So you have three generations of longshore workers in your family.

NORMAN 01:08:16

Yeah.

CONOR 01:08:18

Can you talk a little bit about what it's like to have, you know, so much your family be part of the union?

NORMAN 01:08:24

Until I got here and became an A man and really made this transformation of being proud of being a longshoreman-- And then my son wanted to be like me anyhow. Well, he's 50 something. And he used to work for the city. Well, the city called him back to the same day the longshoremen called him back. Well, he's got a daughter in college, which he just adopted. He adopted two daughters other than his three. And I looked at him do stuff like that, and he's a much better man than I am. He's a man that believes in his family "through thick and thin." He's got two jobs, he's practicing to become a deacon, he mentors teens, and in between that he's always got one or two of his grandkids with him: babysitting. I can't do that. You know, I would, I would think that I can't do that. But see. He said, "I owe it all to you dad." And I just, I just disagree with him. "I don't see where you got it from." But--

HARVEY 01:09:59

He would have been around 18 years old by the time you became clean and sober 1988?

NORMAN 01:10:07

Yeah.

HARVEY 01:10:09

Was he living with you at that time?

NORMAN 01:10:10

No.

HARVEY 01:10:10

No, he was--

NORMAN 01:10:12

He got married. He had a family by that time. Seventeen, eighteen, something like that.

HARVEY 01:10:18

Who did he grow up with?

NORMAN 01:10:19

He grew up partly in Oklahoma.

HARVEY 01:10:24

Okay.

NORMAN 01:10:27

What happened-- My wife at that time, we broke up, and she gave me a choice: I'd take him back to let my parents raise him. Or she would take him to Louisiana, I'd never seen him again. And that was a choice. I remember right today about how he came over. He was three years old and he came over to-- And he put his arm under my neck and he slept like that all night long. And I said, "Aw! This little kid!" You know? And growing up I never knew how his moods was versus me in general or something like that, you know, but I hopefully I didn't bridge that gap. Oh, we sound like it, we feel like it when we communicate. You know? I just told him that, "Son you already got a bird nest in your hand. You started like with the city, they're paying you the same amount of money you would make as a longshoreman. The thing about it is, you got the same benefits, just about, and you know what you're gonna be doing every day five days a week." And so he just missed out on

becoming a B person a couple of months ago because he was in Washington taking his mentor group up there. And he missed it by a few hours. But he said, "It's my calling." I said, "Okay. Why don't you consider'--" He said, "No Dad, I'm gonna work on both. I'll be alright. I just have to put 10 more years in, and I'll have it."

See, he used to work for the city for six years and they let him buy that six years back. So you don't have to put 10 in and fit it and he's got 16 years. And then he'll be-- By that time, he'll be about 60 you know. And then if we ever get to B man here, he can pick and choose if he want to work and never be there. We won't have to come down not having a chance to work.

HARVEY 01:13:10

Is he still working? He works for the city now. Well, he's also a casual?

NORMAN 01:13:16

Then I got a grandson he just started about three months ago.

HARVEY 01:13:21

Is he a casual?

NORMAN 01:13:24

They probably will get their B book about the same time. But that's just the way whatever works out works out for them.

HARVEY 01:13:32

They're both local 10?

NORMAN 01:13:33

Uh-hm.

CONOR 01:13:47

How did you get involved with the pensioner organization?

NORMAN 01:13:50

When I retired in 2011, George Cobbs was the president.

CONOR 01:14:00

Oh yeah, that's right.

NORMAN 01:14:01

And so when I signed up for the pensioners it was about a year and I never give it a second thought, and then Ralph Rucker, who was the vice-president, said, "Why don't you come and get on the Executive Board?" Well, now I want to get on there, so I did. And then while Ralph Rucker was in his hospital bed dying, he said, "You should take the vice-president." "No, I don't want it."

At that time, back in 2015 when we gave that last caucus there, I ran into little problems with Lawrence Thibeaux. It was all in my mind, problems. It wasn't taking into consideration who he was. And so I did a lot of work helping putting this together, and I was almost accused of trying to steal money and stuff when-- Me and my group, the Alcohol and Drug Group gave an excess of \$300-- Three or \$400 of stuff like waters and utensils and stuff. And since I didn't have a receipt for it, I had to give some of the money back. It was a big mess. Gene was helped me sort it out and I think Gene and George kind of let me look at it in a different way. I don't have to be that way. You know. It's sort of like what I did from my heart to help out the situation and that's him. That's on him. And I told George, "If something ever happened to you, I don't want to be no part of this." And it just so happened that George died and I'm Vice-President and I'm still here vice-president. And it's important that I try to pass that on to some of the other members. It's not about being one individual. It's about us collectively as a group. So that's who we are. You know? And so we do a lot of stuff together. We got a better communication that's going on for us.

HARVEY 01:16:34

You and Thibeaux?

NORMAN 01:16:36

Yeah, we speak and I know what to do, know how to do it. And I'm not too politically inclined to jump up on the soapbox and start giving a spiel. I know, if you got something that you need done, I could probably do it. That's kind of a "grunt"-like person, you know, and I don't mind that. Because I did that for George, for the picnics, the dances, the birthdays-- countless birthdays. You know, I tell the group that, "Hey, we're fixing to have a potluck for George tomorrow at such and such place." They would show up. And then at the end, you know, after I started collecting money, it was always short. I'd always have somebody to help me out to make it

right, you know, so. So I never did bother that. So life is pretty good, you know, to be able to come up here and hang out and begin to feel more politically grounded. You know, I'm not too good on the microphone, but I've spoken in front of thousands of people. And that's some different stuff. If I tell you my story about how I come to become an alcoholic, it don't matter who you are, where you come from, it's just me and my story. I have no shame for that anymore. And sometime it might help, it might not help.

CONOR 01:18:31

If you were gonna tell folks in the future, who might be looking at this interview, about one of the lessons you learned about being a longshore worker? What would you tell them? About yourself, what you learned from the union?

NORMAN 01:18:48

The union-- Like this guy Cleophas Williams told me, "If you take care of this union, it'll take care of you." I did not understand that. I was walking by him, head down in a stupor, trying to work. He was on his forklift at lunchtime. He spoke to me, and he said that. I'll never forget that. And that's what this union will do. It's not about the money, per se. It's not about-- It's about the camaraderie of fellowship. This is big. Sort of like-- It reminds me of Alcoholics Anonymous. It's big. It's never going away. It's big. Somebody is always going to pick the torch up.

HARVEY 01:19:56

That's great. Thank you. Much appreciate

CONOR 01:20:04

Thanks.

HARVEY 01:20:06

Thank you very much.